

## **Disaster Strikes at Weyauwega**

# **Amateur Radio Answers Call for Communications from Department of Emergency Government**

The north-central Wisconsin village of Weyauwega got an early and most unwelcome wake-up call on March 4, 1996 when, at about 5:45 a.m., a Wisconsin Central Ltd. freight train enroute to Neenah from Stevens Point derailed on the north edge of the village. Thirty-four cars left the tracks, and 14 or 15 were pressurized tank cars filled with liquid propane. Six of those cars began burning.

Emergency officials decided to take no chances: All 1,700-plus residents were evacuated from the village, many with only the clothing they were wearing. Most evacuees were taken to nearby Waupaca.

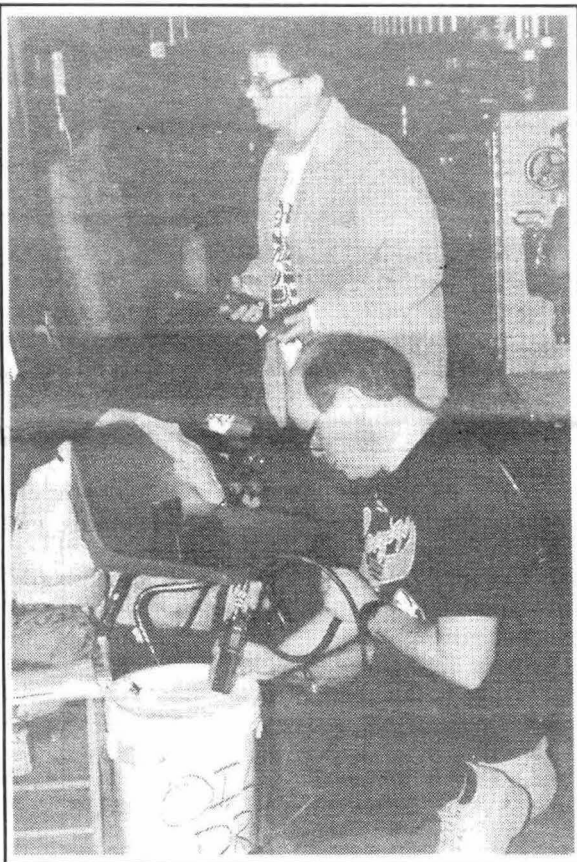
Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) personnel contacted State Director of Emergency Government Al Shanks later that morning, who instructed ARES to activate communications and set up a command post at the Red Cross Center in Waupaca. At DEG's direction, amateurs also provided communications for the incident command post at Weyauwega, at the Fremont WI Fire Station (where all the Weyauwega fire department's equipment was taken to be housed and maintained), and at a road block check point at state highways 10 and 49.

Communications were provided for Red Cross shelters in Waupaca. Circuits were also active from Waupaca to the State Emergency Operations Center of the Department of Emergency Government in Madison, where RACES station WC9AAG was in operation 24 hours a day for nearly two weeks. Two meter repeaters, the 3993.5 kHz RACES frequency, and some packet radio nodes were used for the long-haul path to Madison.

Because of the long duration of the emergency, not enough local operators were available in Waupaca, and a call went out for help. As of March 15, 75 operators from more than 23 Wisconsin counties had volunteered and served at Waupaca - from about a 200 mile radius. In Madison, at WC9AAG, thirty-eight operators did operating stints.

It is too early to provide many more details, and we will have a followup story in our May issue. We close with this: Playing it safe paid off. No one was killed, no one was even hurt. In that situation, it could have been very different.

Please see pages 7 and 9 of this issue.



Peg Haese, KB9LIE, and Bruce Micales, WA2DEU, operated from this position at the Fremont, WI Fire Department. Weyauwega's fire equipment was relocated here. Note the unusual operating table.

- Photo by Bob Aspinwall/KA9JPZ

- Information for this story was provided by

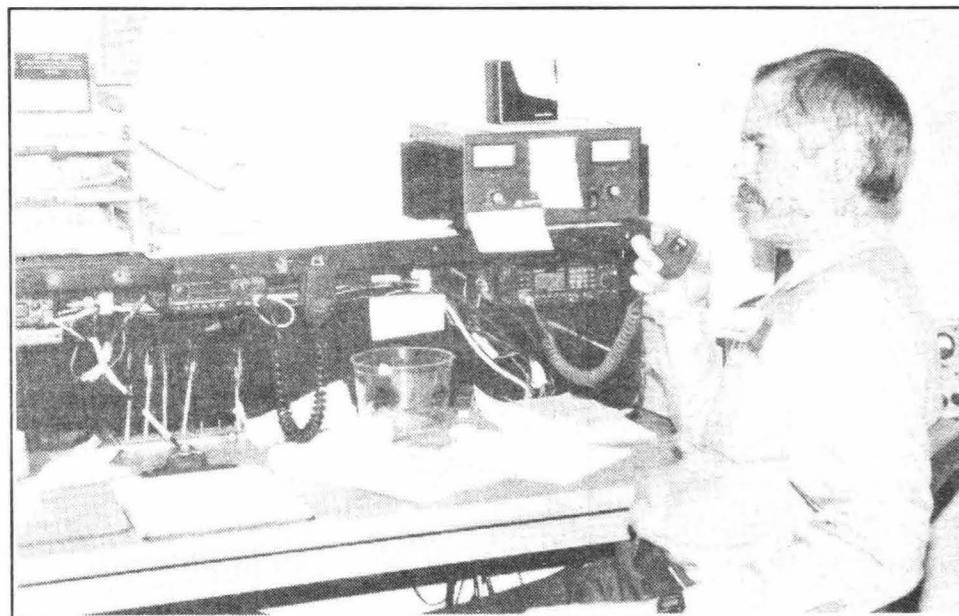
Bob Krueger, N9BKJ, and Bob Aspinwall, KA9JPZ, EC/Dane County

# Hams Help with Communications After Train Wreck Disaster at Weyauwega



Andrew Nemec, KB9ALN, operates near the disaster site. We believe this is in the Waupaca City Hall. Andrew is Skywarn Coordinator and an NCS trainer from Green Bay.

- Photo by Bob Aspinwall/KA9JPZ



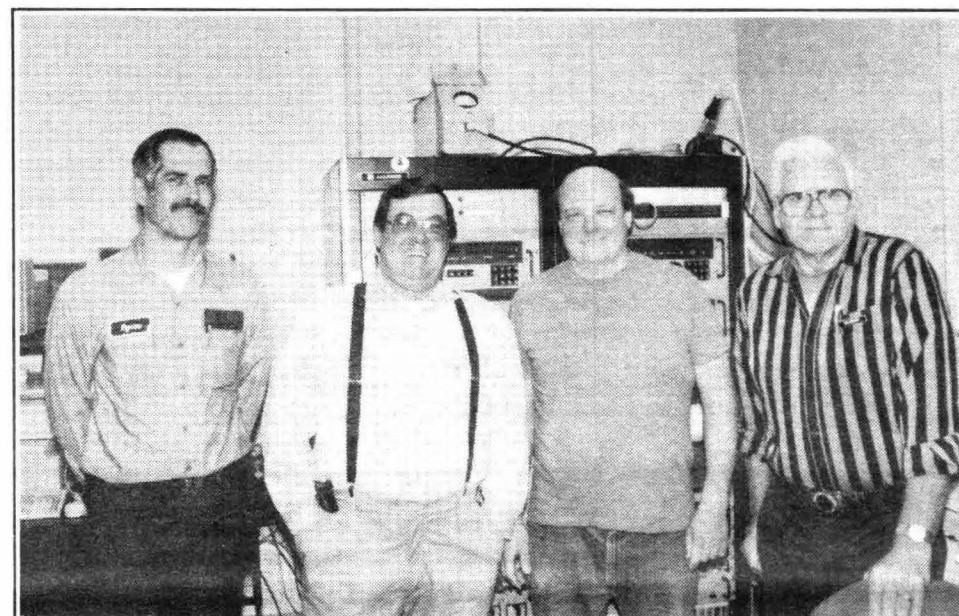
Wisconsin State RACES/DEG station WC9AAG was staffed around the clock for nearly two weeks following the derailment. Operating WC9AAG here is Byron Tetzlaff, N9QRF.

- Photo courtesy Mack Brophy/N9NTB/DEG



Wisconsin Section Emergency Coordinator John Leekley, WB9SMM, and Waupaca County Emergency Coordinator Jeff Ramlow, N9WBR, look over logistics on a state map at the Waupaca net control site.

- Photo by Bob Aspinwall/KA9JPZ



Wisconsin Emergency Government Director Al Shanks, second from left, took a few minutes between shuttling back to Weyauwega to have a photo taken with three radio amateurs who helped staff the Emergency Operations Center in Madison. At left is Paul Toussaint, N9VWH. At Shanks' right are Bryon Tetzlaff, N9QRF, and Al Jeardeau, WB9BRF.

- Photo courtesy Mack Brophy/N9NTB/DEG

## Press Time Update:

As this issue was being prepared for printing, seventeen days after the derailment, authorities were moving residents back into Weyauwega on March 21. This was after Haz-mat and demolition teams, some team members from a Texas company, blasted (that's right!) holes in the two remaining pressurized

cars, then vented and burned the remaining propane. The process went well.

Some problems were waiting for residents, including contaminated village water - a boil water order was issued - but they were all happy nonetheless to be back home again. And trains are once again moving on the repaired rail line.

The amazing fact is that no one was even hurt. Emergency officials had decided to "err on the side of caution." It seems it was the right decision. □